

## Flanagan's Wake at Pheasant Run Review - Who Said a Wake Can't be Fun?

By Michael Radtke

Now playing at the Preservation Hall Studio Theatre at the **Pheasant Run Resort** in St. Charles, *Flanagan's Wake* is an improv comedy that transports theatergoers "across the pond" to, well, the wake of a fun-loving Irishman, Flanagan.



The cast listens intently to the reading of Flanagan's will

Now in its 14th year, *Flanagan's Wake* takes improv comedy to a whole new level with a set up that is one of the most unique and original in modern theater.

When entering the theater, show patrons are greeted by not just the standard theater ticket-taker, house manager and usher, but also by the mayor of a small Irish town (this was the experience of this reviewer and may change on a nightly basis, as this show is completely improvised). As one takes their seat, the cast mingles with the audience, drinking, chatting and sharing bits and pieces about the community and its inhabitants. This is all part of the performance, as -in a rarely seen twist to live theater- the audience themselves are actually characters in the play. Every attendee is given a name-tag, and certain sections are called "families," as if they were actually related somehow to the deceased. The cast will address audience members by name and speak to them as if you they were one of the actors on stage. And, as a staple of improv theater, select audience members are even brought on stage to participate in a variety of ways.

This level of involvement from the audience is bar none in theater. It is set up perfectly to draw the audience into the story by making them feel as if they are personally invested in it. It also serves as a means to create an aura of being at an Irish wake - so instead of merely using a stage to create an illusion, the curtain is thrown out and the entire room and its inhabitants are part of the scenery (and in some cases the story itself).



The town preacher and Flanagan's drinking buddy take issue over Flanagan's will

Consisting of seasoned local actors all familiar with the material from years of performances, *Flanagan's Wake* utilizes a skeleton of a story that remains the same while the details around it (and even actor's roles) change on a nightly basis. The cast of *Flanagan's Wake* all do an exemplary job of thinking on their feet to create hilarious anecdotes as they remember the dearly departed Flanagan. They seem to play with the material as if it were Silly Putty; taking certain elements from current events, as well as audience suggestions, and combine it all to create an unique story night after night. Every member of the cast uses a lightning quick wit to recreate the life and times of Flanagan - creating simple stories to full song and dance numbers right off the tops of their heads. (On the night of this review, the cast members would even test each other's improv abilities by trying to throw some real curve-ball ideas for the other members to work off of; creating hilarious results.)



Break this oath and be cursed!

Improv comedy can be a tricky art-form to work in and *Flanagan's Wake* is possibly one of the best examples of what a combination of the right concept and actors can do. There is certainly a reason that this play has thrived for 14 seasons; convincing many to return multiple times. (One theatergoer this reviewer spoke to said it was her third time "mourning" the late Flanagan.) It is a unique, hilarious and exciting play that will be enjoyed by anyone who attends, guaranteed.

*Flanagan's Wake* is playing now through March 29, 2009 at the **Pheasant Run Resort** located at 4051 E. Main St. In St. Charles, Illinois. For tickets, please call the box office at 630-584-6342. For more information about Flanagan's Wake or other performances by **Noble Fool Theatricals**, please visit [www.noblefool.org](http://www.noblefool.org).